

PINK-FOOTED AND GREYLAG GEESE IN BRITAIN

16th/17th November 1985

The 26th annual autumn census of Pink-footed Anser brachyrhynchus and Greylag Geese A. anser in Britain took place over the weekend of 16th/17th November 1985. New record totals of 128,000 Pinkfeet and 107,000 Greylags were counted. The breakdown of the counts by region, district, and county is shown overleaf.

Weather and general conditions

The weather was certainly much kinder than in November 1984, though there was some snow and ice about in east and north-east Scotland. Drizzle and fog in a few areas produced that goose-counters' bane, poor visibility, but the majority of counters had good clear weather, especially on the Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

The summer and early autumn of 1985 was one of the wettest and coldest on record, and had it not been for the fine, warm October, the grain harvest would have been a complete disaster. Even so, there were still some unharvested fields around in November, while because of the lateness of the harvest, ploughing and immediate sowing with winter barley, which has become all the rage in the last few years, was severely curtailed. There were thus much greater areas of stubble available to the geese than in recent years, containing an abundance of spilt and sprouting grain. This produced some large flocks of feeding geese, up to 10,000 strong, often very close to the roosts. Such a concentration of birds, compared with the more scattered distribution of recent years, should have led to better coverage by the census.

PINKFEET

The total of 128,000 Pinkfeet is a new record for the species. Because of the very poor count in November 1984 it is better to look back to the total of 101,000 in November 1983, giving a two-year increase of just over a quarter. The breeding season in 1985 was only average. 13.9% young seen in a sample of over 8400, and a mean brood size of 2.3. This compares with the much better breeding success in 1984 (20.2%), suggesting that the estimate of 114,000 for November 1984 was probably a little low.

From the regional breakdown on page 3, it can be seen that South-east Scotland had an unusually high concentration of birds, while North and East England both showed considerable declines. The recent increases in East England, which can be linked with years when there has been little grain spilt in Scotland, have been reversed, the birds no doubt finding so much food in Scotland this autumn that they had no need to fly further south.

Numbers of Pinkfeet and Greylags in Britain, Nov. 1983 to Nov. 1985

	PINKFEET			GREYLAGS		
	13 Nov 1983	18 Nov 1984	17 Nov 1985	13 Nov 1983	18 Nov 1984	17 Nov 1985
Orkney	-	-	-	680	310	630
Highland						
Caithness	-	-	-	7450	1700	3330
Sutherland	-	-	-	3130	-	110
Ross & Cromarty	40	410	-	1070	5530	5370
Inverness	-	-	-	500	-	80
Badenoch & Strathspey	-	-	-	-	50	510
Nairn	-	-	-	410	1360	-
Grampian						
Moray	-	-	-	810	1860	6140
Banff & Buchan	2850	8850	12100	5600	4250	4620
Gordon	10700	11000	13800	7020	6920	9440
Kincardine & Dee	-	-	-	6000	7000	15000
Tayside						
Angus	13220	11860	15300	7900	4530	41
Perth & Kinross	14260	11780	15230	18230	12060	34390
Central						
Stirling	3730	1350	1230	250	350	1030
Fife	8000	2500	5000	1250	-	1000
Lothians						
West Lothian	2000	490	10	1980	580	960
Midlothian	13600	70	4600	930	220	130
East Lothian	3420	-	10400	720	250	510
Borders						
Tweeddale	3600	2700	10590	30	-	10
Roxburgh	1800	3000	8700	3850	1260	2100
Berwickshire	3340	-	4430	580	930	1080
Strathclyde						
Argyll & Bute	-	-	-	3570	4170	4570
Cunningham	-	-	-	130	170	-
Dunbarton	-	-	-	350	2000	1000
Strathkelvin	-	-	-	-	300	300
Lanark	290	1140	780	-	-	-
Renfrew	-	-	-	-	150	-
Kyle & Carrick	-	-	-	490	580	190
Dumfries & Galloway						
Wigtown	-	-	-	3320	2580	2940
Stewartry	-	-	-	1900	2280	1350
Nithsdale	2620	4630	6830	300	720	450
Cumbria	20	-	-	800	630	1090
Lancashire	16280	15610	15000	-	-	-
Northumberland	80	190	-	2300	3520	4200
Humberside	-	-	250	-	-	-
Lincolnshire	300	320	30	-	-	-
Norfolk	970	9000	3850	-	-	-
TOTALS	101000	86000	<u>128000</u>	82000	64000	<u>107000</u>

GREYLAGS

This species, too, has reached a new record level, beating the previous highest of 96,000 in November 1981. The breeding success was below average, at 11.2%, with mean brood size of 2.1. Over 80% of the birds were concentrated in the North and East central areas of Scotland, with fewer birds than in recent years in the other regions.

Regional distribution of Pinkfeet and Greylags, Nov. 1983 to Nov. 1984

	PINKFEET			GREYLAGS		
	Nov. 1983	Nov. 1984	Nov. 1985	Nov. 1983	Nov. 1984	Nov. 1985
North Scotland	13.4	19.4	20.2	40.1	42.0	42.4
East central Scotland	38.8	32.0	28.7	33.9	26.4	38.0
South-east Scotland	27.5	12.6	30.2	9.9	5.0	4.5
South-west Scotland	2.9	6.7	5.9	12.3	20.1	11.1
North England	16.2	18.4	11.7	3.8	6.5	3.9
East England	1.2	10.9	3.2	-	-	-

Figures are percentages of total populations.

Spring census

The fifth in the present series of spring censuses will take place over the weekend of 15th/16th March 1986. Counters on my mailing list for this report will find the usual request form and postcard enclosed.

Acknowledgements

As always I am grateful to the large number of people who took part in this census. The thanks are more special because I am leaving the Wildfowl Trust at the end of April to take up the post of Director of the Islay Field Centre. This is a new venture, funded by the Islay Natural History Trust, which hopes to encourage the recording of all aspects of natural history on the island, and to see that knowledge made use of in education and research. I will, of course, still be involved with geese, one can hardly avoid them on Islay, and I may even find time to continue looking at Pinkfeet and Greylags. The censuses will continue to be organised from Slimbridge and the new organiser will be circulating the report on the forthcoming March census. In the meantime, my personal thanks and good wishes to you all. I am fortunate enough to know many of you in person, though perhaps rather too many remain as merely names on all those postcards. If you ever come to Islay, please visit the Field Centre, in Port Charlotte, and make yourself known to me.

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